



Arizona State Senate Issue Paper

September 27, 2006

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FLORES v. ARIZONA

INTRODUCTION

In 1992, *Flores v. State of Arizona* was filed in federal district court. The lawsuit was brought forth by parents of children enrolled in the Nogales Unified School District. The plaintiffs alleged that the civil rights of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students were violated because the state failed to provide a program of instruction that included adequate language acquisition, academic instructional programs and funding for at-risk, low-income, minority students.

Plaintiffs argued that the state's failure regarding LEP programs was a violation of the federal Equal Educational Opportunities Act (EEOA). The EEOA requires all public schools to provide LEP children with a program of instruction designed to make them competent in speaking, understanding, reading and writing English, while enabling them to learn the standard curriculum taught to all students in the school district. The plaintiffs claimed that the state allowed school districts to administer LEP programs that did not meet EEOA standards and failed to monitor school district compliance with those standards. Among other items, the plaintiffs alleged that public school districts allowed students to exit LEP programs and enter mainstream classrooms when those students still lacked necessary English language and reading comprehension skills.

DISTRICT COURT JUDGMENT

In January 2000, the District Court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs and declared Arizona's LEP programs in violation of the EEOA because the funding level as it related to LEP students was "arbitrary and capricious." While the District Court agreed that Arizona's standards were based on sound educational theory, it did not agree that the existing programs served to appropriately advance the standards. The ruling stated that there were: 1) too many students in a classroom; 2) not enough classrooms; 3) not enough qualified teachers; 4) not enough teacher aids; 5) inadequate tutoring programs; and 6) insufficient teaching materials. The District Court further ruled that these deficiencies were a result of inadequate funding. The state did not appeal this decision.

CONSENT ORDER

In August 2000, then Arizona Superintendent Lisa Graham Keegan entered into a consent decree with plaintiffs that resolved the District Court's concern regarding program adequacy, monitoring and nonresource issues. The consent decree required that the State Board of Education and the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) adopt official rules and policies that put in place: 1) standardized methods of identifying limited English proficient students; 2) uniform performance standards for determining and reassessing English proficiency, including but not limited to opportunities for compensatory instruction; 3) alignment of curriculum with academic standards and instructional strategies appropriate for English Learners student achievement; 4) criteria on individual education plans for English Learners; and 5) monitoring and compliance responsibilities by the ADE.

While the state resolved the issue of program adequacy through a consent decree, the issue of funding was not addressed.

PROPOSITION 203

The voters approved Proposition 203 in November 2000. Proposition 203 repealed existing bilingual education laws and enacted new law to require that all classes be taught in English, except that pupils who are classified as English Language Learners (ELL), previously LEP, would be educated separately through structured English immersion for a period not to exceed a year.

English immersion programs provide nearly all classroom instruction and materials in English, but may use a minimal amount of the pupil's native language when necessary. Students could be exempted from this requirement if the school district or charter school grants a bilingual education waiver upon request by the pupil's parent.

INITIAL COST STUDY

Since no action had been taken in the 2000 legislative session regarding funding for ELL programs, in October 2000, the District Court

ordered the state to conduct a cost study to determine how much additional funding would be required to address the deficiencies in the ELL programs noted in the January 2000 ruling. The District Court set the completion deadline date by January 2001 so that the Legislature would have sufficient time to review the results of the cost study and take appropriate action to fund the deficiencies.

In May of 2001, the ADE released an "English Acquisition Program Cost Study" that identified per-pupil costs in the sampled immersion programs. However, the cost study did not contain any specific conclusions or recommendations, only an estimated price range of \$0 to \$4,600 per ELL student.

In June 2001, the District Court ordered the state to comply with the January 2000 ruling by the "end of any special session convened by the State Legislature" prior to January 31, 2002. The District Court believed that the state should adjust the minimum level of funding per ELL student to an amount that reflects actual funding needed for a nonfluent English-speaking pupil to successfully achieve proficiency in English.

DECEMBER 2001 SPECIAL SESSION

In December 2001, during a special session, the Legislature approved HB 2010, which increased the ELL Group B weight to reflect an increase from approximately \$179 per pupil to \$340, and provided additional monies for teacher training, compensatory instruction, instructional materials, monitoring, teacher bonuses, a K-3 Literacy Program and another cost study. The deadline set for the cost study was August 1, 2004.

In April 2002, the plaintiffs challenged the per-pupil funding levels in HB 2010 and argued that the \$340 per-pupil amount was also arbitrary and capricious. The District Court ordered the state to complete another cost study by January 1, 2003. In addition, the District Court set a compliance deadline of June 30, 2003, for the state to create a funding plan commensurate with the findings of the cost study. The state immediately filed a motion for reconsideration to prove to the District Court that HB 2010 satisfied the January 2000 order.

In June 2002, the District Court reconsidered its earlier ruling and recognized the cost study deadline set during the special session.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES (NCSL) COST STUDY

In August 2004, the NCSL consultants selected by the Legislature to conduct the cost study published an executive summary of the study. A final study was released in February 2005. The recommendations ranged from \$670 to \$2,571 per pupil, depending on grade level and various at-risk factors.

2005 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

In December 2004, the plaintiffs filed a motion with the District Court asking that it establish a deadline at the end of the 2005 legislative session for the state to comply with the judgment. In January 2005, the District Court ordered that the state comply with the judgment and adequately fund ELL programs by the end of the legislative session.

In response, the Legislature passed HB 2718 that included revisions to the assessment, classification, reassessment and monitoring of ELL pupils, created a taskforce, codified the consent decree and provided funding for an ELL Group B weight increase for FY 2005-2006. HB 2718 was vetoed by the Governor in May 2005.

In December 2005, the District Court ordered financial penalties imposed against the state in the form of progressive daily fines until the state complied with the judgment. In addition, the District Court excluded ELL pupils from the Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) graduation requirement.

2006 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

On January 24, 2006, the Legislature passed SB 1198 to address the *Flores* order. Similar to HB 2718, the bill also established new individual and corporate income tax credits for contributions made to student tuition organizations to provide private school scholarship and tuition grants to ELL pupils. The Governor vetoed this bill primarily due to the "uncapped" nature of the tax credits and called the Legislature into special session.

The next day, the Legislature passed HB 2002, which was identical to SB 1198, except for a \$50 million cap for the corporate income tax credits. The Governor again vetoed this bill citing that the provisions in the bill did not satisfy the court order and that the tax credits were outside of the call of the special session.

On March 2, 2006, the Legislature passed HB 2064, which included similar provisions from SB 1198 and HB 2002, but excluded individual and corporate tax credits for ELL pupils. Additionally, the bill contained a conditional enactment to increase the Group B ELL weight, increasing per-pupil funding to \$432, contingent upon the District Court's acceptance that HB 2064 fulfills the 2000 order. The Governor allowed the legislation to become law without her signature. At that time, daily fines ordered by the District Court had accumulated to \$21 million.

On March 13, 2006, the District Court ruled that the \$21 million in daily fines that had accumulated should be distributed to school districts and again ruled that ELL pupils should not be subject to the AIMS graduation requirement until an appropriate funding scheme could be implemented. On April 27, 2006, the District Court ruled that HB 2064 did not satisfy the 2000 District Court order. The Superintendent of Public Instruction, as well as attorneys representing the Legislature, appealed the ruling to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals.

The provisions of HB 2064 became effective September 21, 2006, with the exception of the Group B weight increase.

CIRCUIT COURT OF APPEALS

On August 24, the Court of Appeals vacated the District Court's assessment of fines, removal of the AIMS graduation requirement for ELL pupils and rejection of HB 2064. Instead, the Court of Appeals remanded the case to District Court for an evidentiary hearing. The appellate court cited that since "the landscape of educational funding has changed significantly" since the 2000 court order, an evidentiary hearing should be held regarding whether "changed circumstances" would require modification of the 2000 order. The District

Court has scheduled an evidentiary hearing for January 9 through January 12, 2007.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- *Flores v. Arizona*, 48 F.Supp.2d 937 (D.Ariz. 1999)
- *Flores v. Arizona*, 172 F.Supp.2d 1225 (D.Ariz. 2000)
- *Flores v. Arizona*, 160 F.Supp.2d 1043 (D.Ariz. 2000)
- *Flores v. Arizona*, (not reported) F.Supp.2d (D.Ariz. 2001)
- *Flores v. Arizona*, 405 F.Supp.2d 1112 (D.Ariz. 2005)
- *Flores v. Rzeslawski*, Slip Copy, 2006 WL 2460741 (C.A.9.Ariz. 2006) – Westlaw Citation only.
- Equal Educational Opportunities Act, 20 United States Code Section 1703
- Arizona Revised Statutes, Title 15, Chapter 7, Article 3.1 and A.R.S. § 15-943
- Proposition 203 Publicity Pamphlet for November 7, 2000 General Election, prepared by the Arizona Secretary of State
<http://www.azsos.gov/election/2000/info/PubPamphlet/english/prop203.htm>